

JESUS AS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST (HEB 4: 14-16)

Before we get into our Bible study (which will cover the last few verses of Hebrews Ch 4) I wanted to take a little time this morning to address an important issue that's related to Hebrews. There have been questions raised in this class about God's covenant people Israel, the Jewish people. I want to talk about that. One can be a Jew by their ETHNICITY and/ or their RELIGION. Ethnic Jews are those who are the direct physical ancestors of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and King David. Religious Jews are those who practice the Jewish religion in some form but may not necessarily be an ethnic Jew (more than likely they have no idea whether they are or not). In modern Israel (population 9.3 million) 74% (7 million) identify themselves as Jewish. Of those 43% (3 million) are "secular" Jews which means they are non-practicing Jews. The research I did claims that 20% of all Israelis today are atheists or agnostics. So you can see, the demographics of modern day Israel are **totally different** than those of Israel in Bible times (back in those days the vast majority of the Israelite people were practicing Jews because the Jewish religion was so closely tied to their culture and everyday life).

In the O.T. God made many promises to His covenant people (Jews by both ancestry and religious practice). These promises came thru the various prophets. So then, Who would they be today? Who are the recipients of those O.T. promises yet to be fulfilled (many of the promises have already been fulfilled in Jesus)? The answer is a bit complicated because of the various dispersions of the Jewish people; nations coming and going over the centuries, intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews becoming more common, and the land being overrun and conquered many times. The O.T. promises yet unfulfilled will eventually be fulfilled to all those who identify themselves at the time as being Jewish, whether by ethnicity or religion. Will God eventually fulfill all the promises that He made to His covenant people? I firmly believe that God WILL keep those promises. I do NOT believe in what is known as "replacement theology," that the N.T. church replaced Israel. This idea suggests that the Jewish

people forfeited God's promises because they rejected their Messiah (Jesus). That's not what the N.T. teaches. For example, when we studied the Book of Revelation last year we saw that God's promises to redeem Israel (the 144,000) will be fulfilled during the tribulation period (Rev 7). There will be a mass revival among the Jewish people. Many in that group will be agnostics or atheists, non-practicing Jews. Many of those converted Jews will become God's instruments to lead a worldwide revival. So that's where I stand theologically.

For the record, politically, I feel very strongly that we as a nation, the U.S., must continue to support our ally Israel against her many enemies. As Christians, our roots are in Judaism. Jesus our Lord and Savior was a Jew by birth, in His incarnation. I view that whole region we call the nation of Israel today (including the West Bank, Golan Heights and Gaza Strip) as hallowed ground. I believe it is all part of the land that God promised to His covenant people way back in the O.T.

That brings me to my next topic

READ "What is the term for a Jew that is converted to Christ?"

READ "Summarize the Hebrews study to date"

READ Hebrews 4:14.

The writer of Hebrews shifts his focus back on Jesus. Here He is pictured as our what? Our great high priest. It says here that we "we have a great high priest." The high priest brought the people to God. What makes Jesus our great high priest? What are His qualifications?

READ Hebrews 4:15-16

The writer of Hebrews mentions several things that qualify Jesus as our great high priest.

V 14, Jesus is a high priest who “passed thru the heavens.” He did this when He ascended back to heaven and entered the Father’s presence. The Son of God, His mission complete, returned to the glory of heaven.

Throughout Hebrews there’s this contrast being made between all of those O.T. elements and what we have now in the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Here we see the contrast made between Jesus as our high priest and those O.T. high priests. High Priest Jesus, the Son of God completes His redemptive work and returns to heaven. Hebrews 1:3 tells us “After making purification for our sins (what He did on the cross) He (Jesus) sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high (God the Father), having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” That wonderful passage in Philippians Ch 2 comes to mind here – “Therefore (because of His obedience to follow thru with God’s plan and die for our sins on the cross) God has highly exalted Him (Jesus) and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name...” (Phil 2:9). Jesus’ work is finished and He does what no priest could ever do. He sits down.

By contrast an O.T. high priest’s work was never finished. Their work went on year after year. Every year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) the high priest took the blood of a bull, ram or goat and he went thru a door into the outer court, then thru the door into the holy place and finally thru the veil into the Holy of Holies. There he would sprinkle the blood of that animal over the mercy seat for the sins of the people. This was repeated year after year. Later on Hebrew 9 we are told that Jesus “entered once for all into the holy places, not by the means of [animals] but by His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). Jesus’ one time action satisfied the holy requirement of God for all time. Jesus’ high priesthood is full and final. Because of what He did we no longer need a priest. In fact, as believers in Jesus Christ we become a “kingdom of priests” (Rev 5:10), a “holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5).

John MacArthur says this: "The millions of gallons of blood that ran all over the altars of Israel for hundreds and hundreds of years, the sprinkled blood that stained and crusted on the mercy seat year after year couldn't do what the one great High priest did in one great act for all time, and then entered into heaven, into the heavenly holy of holies, showed the sacrifice to the Father and sat down on His right hand forever."

Jesus is the Son of God (v 14). He is fully God. It's interesting that both the Jews and the Greeks of the first century had this same concept of God, of Him being "at a distance." They believed that God was all-powerful and could see everything that was going on down here, yet was somewhat detached. But that's not true, is it? V 15 talks about how Jesus our great high priest sympathizes with our weaknesses. He understands us. He knows what we are going through. How is that Jesus, the Son of God, can understand us and sympathize with us? Because He's walked in our shoes. He left the glory of heaven and came down to this old dusty earth and for 33 years He dwelt among us. He became fully man. He experienced what we experience. He knew what it was like to live in a fallen, sinful world. Several places in the Gospels show Jesus as being filled with emotion, sometimes even crying, weeping. Jesus felt the sorrows and the hurts we feel. V 15 says that Jesus was "tempted as we are yet without sin." The same core issues that might lead our hearts astray today were around back then even if the packaging is different. Jesus was sinless. But all those O.T. high priests were not. They had to go thru the process of making purification for their own sins before they were allowed to go before a holy God on behalf of the people. What a contrast!

Jesus has a love and compassion for us that no human high priest ever had. Next time we'll take a look at a couple of high priests to whom Jesus is compared to and contrasted with. So Jesus is fully qualified to be our great high priest.

V 16 says that because of Jesus we can approach God, the "throne of grace" with confidence where we will find mercy and grace. What is it that

a sinner needs the most? Judgment? Guilt? A lecture? No. They need compassion, mercy and forgiveness. They need a Savior. And that's exactly what Jesus provides. Salvation, redemption, love! That is the heart of our great High Priest.

And because of that we can sing "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus."